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SUBJECT: CHAD: MAVERICK OPPOSITIONIST UNDERLINES
OPPOSITION DISUNITY

REF: NDJAMENA 296

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Opposition leader Yorongar, in a call on the Ambassador February 27, said that the opposition would never agree on a single candidate but, if (huge if) fair elections could be assured, Deby would lose to almost anyone. He cited recent rebel activity in the south as a further element of growing instability in Chad. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Ngarlejj Yorongar, traditionally the most outspoken of the opposition leaders in Chad, called on the Ambassador February 27. His constituency is the oil-producing region in southern Chad (Eastern Logone province). Unlike most other oppositionists who opposed Deby in the past two presidential elections he garnered some support outside his district, but he seems to have lost national standing due to intemperate accusations against virtually every politician on the scene. This past week he saw defection of three members of his opposition bloc within the National Assembly, thereby losing its previous standing as a voting bloc in the assembly.

¶3. (SBU) Yorongar opened with a recital of all that ails Chad at present -- friction with Sudan, mounting instability in the East, an incipient rebellion in the South, and a crisis in relations with the World Bank. He said that he was long on record condemning the incompetence of Chad's negotiations with the oil companies. Deby's cronies and relatives had led these negotiations, had been out of their depth, and produced an agreement that gave Chad less than it deserved. However, Yorongar said, the agreements with the oil companies and with the World Bank were in place and back-pedaling on them brought discredit to Chad. In Yorongar's analysis, the prospect of oil revenues had whetted Deby's appetite for power on a bigger stage, propelling him to incite rebellion in Darfur and seek more money to buy the armaments necessary to sustain these ambitions. Yorongar took particular umbrage at what he described as inadequate recompense in the oil agreements for his home oil-producing area.

¶4. (SBU) As for rebellion in the South, Yorongar cited two separate series of incidents that he claimed had taken place in the past two weeks. First, he said, a rebel group operating under Col. Michel Mbaillemal had staged two attacks in the area of the towns of Bam and Bessao in the area close

to the tri-border with Cameroon and CAR. They had destroyed vehicles and for a time occupied the town of Bessao before withdrawing. A second group under Col. Dassart was operating in Moyen Chari province between Bailli and Sarh. It had destroyed 12 vehicles in one attack and four in another, and seized four officers from the Chadian armed forces. Yorongar emphasized two aspects to these attacks: these groups were operating with ease near cities such as Moundou and Sarh and could probably attack them too, and the government forces, reprisals were wrought against the villages. Yorongar claimed that the armed forces were too thin on the ground to do much to impede the rebels, but they were harming innocent southern villagers, about whom the northern government's feelings had never been tender.

15. (SBU) The Ambassador turned the discussion to the announcement that presidential elections would take place May 3 -- would Yorongar participate? Yorongar did not answer directly but said the populace was sick and tired of fake elections. The opposition had made a serious proposal in September to President Deby to institute a dialogue leading toward a fair election, but Deby had not taken up the offer. Yorongar said that he would favor a deferral of the election, but it would only be useful if the deferral were at least six-eight months and if there were strict international supervision of a process to rectify the electoral lists and reconstitute the electoral commission.

16. (SBU) Noting that Yorongar had not joined the opposition coalition CPDC with the other prominent oppositionists, the Ambassador asked whether he would now join the coalition and work with it to produce a single candidate? Yorongar said that he did not trust or respect the other oppositionists. They had betrayed him many times and had often taken cabinet

positions in the government. However, Yorongar said that he had not burned his bridges with them and he was ready to work with them.

17. (SBU) Yorongar said that he agreed with the Ambassador's observation that those in power would benefit from disunity in the opposition. However, he said, neither the opposition in general nor the CPDC in particular would ever agree on a single candidate. He cited his experience during the election of 1996, when he was arrested and beaten, was no longer at that time able to use his legs, had gone to Paris for medical treatment, and received a visit there from two of the other principal candidates, Wadal Abdelkader Kamougue and Jean Bawoyeu Alingue. He said he had told them he would take himself out of the running and had urged the two of them to decide on a single candidate -- but they had refused, and they would always refuse.

18. (SBU) In any case, Yorongar said, the benefit to Deby would not be nearly enough to get him elected on an even playing field. If a serious dialogue with the opposition got under way, leading to a new electoral list and commission and an election under strict international supervision -- if there were a free and fair election -- there could be any number of candidates and Deby could present himself again as a candidate, but he would lose even in the North.

19. (SBU) Comment: Yorongar's assessment of opposition disunity is as bleak as the French Ambassador's (reftel). Members of the CPDC assure us privately that they could come up with a single candidate if a serious dialogue got under way, but their claim is untested. Yorongar is not that single candidate as no credible interlocutor believes that he could ever command national support. The southern rebel activity is relatively minor by comparison with events in the East but bears watching.

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